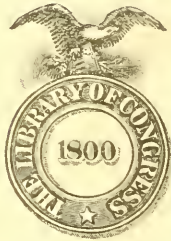


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HOMPSON'S ODS



Forrest Crissey



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In THOMPSON'S
WOODS 
Forrest Crissey



THE BLUE SKY PRESS
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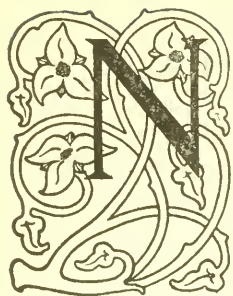
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NOT long after he had abandoned the spoon as an instrument for conveying food from his plate to his mouth, the Boy became the victim of an absorbing and loverly sentimentality.

But it was not his fault. That he was prematurely forced into the role of Romeo, at a stage of juvenile immaturity, and compelled to act the Lover before he had formed any definite ideas of what constitutes a satisfactory suitor or the line of conduct most becoming to such an ardent personage, was due to the affectional precocity and maidenly perseverance of a certain small, witching and vivacious young miss.

To those who are wise in the affairs of the heart may be left the explanation of the fact that childhood in the city enjoys a much longer period of immunity from the attacks of the Sly Archer than in the country, where the embryo woman in short dresses is a shameless coquette at

a time when the boy of her own years regards her as a petty nuisance, if he so much as recognizes her existence. But of this fact there can be no question.

It was, therefore, while he was still "afraid of the dark" that the boy became the object of a tender conspiracy and received a gratuitous and almost compulsory initiation into the mysteries and vicissitudes of rural courtship. It is true that, during this probationary stage of his training in the arts of love-making, he steadfastly regarded the New Teacher as the supreme mistress of his heart, brought to her the biggest and rosiest apples that the gnarled old "Maiden Blush" trees in the West Orchard yielded, searched the pasture for the lustiest violets that they might be timidly laid upon her desk, and would have spurned the thought that the time might come when he would cease to pay her his fondest adorations. But, by grace of some strange law of perversity, he suffered no rebukes of conscience on this score, nor was he aware of any duplicity of conduct as he progressed from

indifference and stupidity to becoming ardor under the skilful tutelage of his small preceptor.

It was while the springtime stirrings of sentiment were still warm and throbbing in the hearts of swelling buds that the Boy was impressed into the ranks of the world's lovers. The day itself impelled to an awakening of dormant faculties. Its blossom-scented breath, its broad, shimmering sunlight and its subtle atmospheric suggestion of awakening life touched every animate object into lively sympathy with its own quickened and sensitive but dream-laden spirit. The irresistible revival of Romance was in the air.

On his way to school that morning, the Boy noticed that the calves in Thompson's pasture were frisking about in a series of grotesque and ungainly gambols, and that the swarms of butterflies which scurried up from the glossy, chocolate-hued margin of the drying mudpuddle, in the center of the road, flashed their yellow wings with unwonted animation

and were dancing, with taunting and airy abandon, far over the pasture fence, before he could strike one of them down with his palm-leaf hat.

Even Totman's spavined and superannuated old gray horse, which grazed and hobbled along the public highway, paid tribute to the rare and energizing qualities of the day by striking into a lively shamble in response to the passing shout of the Boy.

Lessons were an intrusion and an irritation, and the suppressed activities of the feminine contingent of the school vented themselves in a running fire of girlish giggles, while a fusillade of well-masticated paper wads filled the air from the Boy's Side of the room whenever the teacher turned to explain the examples on the black-board for the benefit of the "B" arithmetic class. An epidemic of thirst seized the entire school and before First Recess the water pail in the front entry had been visited by the majority of the pupils. Restlessness was the prevailing mood and a score of persistently raised

hands and snapping fingers were patiently answered by the New Teacher, only to provoke the monotonous and plaintive repetition of the appeal: "Teacher, please m' I go 'n sit with—" and the question was invariably interrupted with an affirmative answer.

By the time the school marched out, in single file, for the Noon Hour, the understanding had become general that all the pupils who were not obliged to return to their homes for dinner should take their lunch pails and repair to Thompson's Woods, the scene of immemorial Sunday school picnics and Fourth of July celebrations, there to spend the mid-day intermission in frolics about the weather-beaten and gaping lemonade booths, in games upon the smooth, green turf of the more open spaces, and in rambles after violets, ground-nuts and crinkle root where the trees were huge and moss-grown and the thick carpet of dead leaves underfoot was but sparingly sprinkled with tiny glints of sunlight.

The journey across Reinhart's

meadow was made with a gleeful rush, and the Boy soon seated himself tentatively upon the edge of one of the picnic benches, drew the refractory cover from his dinner pail and took from within a warped and heated rectangle of bread, which exuded a heavy buttery fragrance never to be forgotten by the boy who has "carried" his dinner. He broke the double layer of bread into two sections, ate out the softer interior of the piece in his right hand and was about to throw away the skeleton of crust when the girl with the two long braids abruptly sat down beside him and said:

"Oh, gimme a bite! I didn't bring any dinner today and I'm awful hungry."

He handed her the broken pieces of bread in his left hand; his face flushed and his powers of speech became temporarily paralyzed.

"Say," she continued, "I'm going to start the Needle's Eye. That big bare spot over there's just the place for it. Come on—let's!"

And without waiting for a reply she

seized his hand and led him helplessly into the treeless open, where they stood facing each other with hands joined and arms uplifted. Their mates, by clasping hands, quickly formed into a ring, which was designed to rotate between the girl with long braids and the Boy, passing beneath the arch formed by their upstretched arms.

With hands swaying and feet shuffling, the waiting circle began the chant:

With bow so neat,
And kiss so sweet;
We do intend, before we end,
This happy pair shall meet again!

Full well the Boy knew that he was expected to express in actions the graceful insinuations of the refrain. He nodded his head with a stiff jerk at the cue of the "bow so neat," but at that moment he caught the eye of a grinning companion, and his courage for the remainder of the ceremony deserted him. There was an awkward and expectant pause in the chant. Had it continued long he would have turned and fled. But it did not. His partner gave her long

braids a quick, coquettish shake, leaned saucily forward and exclaimed!

“Kiss me—you little Ninny!”

He obeyed and the circle started forward, winding under the archway of arms and singing:

The needle's eye
That doth supply
The thread that runs so truly
O, many a lass have I let pass
Because I wanted you-ly!

At the end of the last syllable she pulled his hands down upon the neck of the Solemn Girl. This captive took the place of the initiator of the game and the ceremony was repeated until the clang of the First Bell warned the merry-makers to return to the schoolhouse.

The crimson circles still glowed in his cheeks long after he had taken his seat. He dared not lift his eyes from his book to look in the direction of the Girls' Side.

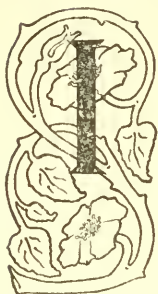
The realization of his stupidity was strong upon him, and he wondered if She would ever speak to him again. His doubts, however, were of short duration.

When he returned from the geography recitation he found upon his desk a minutely folded piece of paper. It was laboriously unfolded, and he then read this assuring message:

if you love me as i love you
No knife can cut our love in to.

After school, that night, the girl did not go “cross-lots” to her home, as usual. Instead, she chose a longer way by the road—and the Boy walked meekly and awkwardly by her side!

IN THOMPSON'S WOODS



WONDER if in Thomp-
son's woods
The violets push their mod-
est hoods
Through bedded leaves
which frosts and suns
Have wasted to frail skele-
tons—

Networks of silver veins to strain
Sunlight and shadow, dew and rain,
Into a nectar that shall thrill
Hearts of new violets, and fill,
With odors of the budding wood,
Each heart within each blushing hood.

I wonder if in Thompson's wood
The partridge rears her speckled brood,
And scuds away beneath the brush
When alien footsteps break the hush
That hangs above her mossy nest
And dwells within her mottled breast.
I wonder if the springtime brings
The whirr of countless pigeons' wings,
The thousand springtime signs and
sounds
With which my memory abounds.

I wonder if the summer's night
Is threaded by the wheeling flight
Of mad-cap whip-poor-will, whose cry,
Like wail of ghost, goes shud'ring by.
I wonder if the beeches wave
As soft a shimmer o'er your grave,
Sweet girl, as when the hunter's moon
Turned midnight into brightest noon,
And first I kissed you as we stood,—
That night of nights!—in Thompson's
Wood.

MOTHER'S SUNBONNET

There are hats by the dozen and score
On their pegs in the shop windows
 bright,
And bonnets with ribbons galore,
The eyes of each passer invite—
Some soft as the neck of a dove,
Or as apple blooms jeweled with dew;
Some fair as a day-dream of love,
And dearer, by far, it is true!—
But friends I would barter them all
And trim them with greenbacks and
 gold
For a moment of time to recall
From the dust of the grave, as of old,
A patient and glorified face
And the checkered sunbonnet whose
 brim
Was touched with a halo of grace
From mother's eyes, faded and dim!

THE SONG OF SONGS

Ah! poet, vainly striving for a theme
To voice the unformed music of the
 heart,
And catch within the cunning net of art
The faint elusive phantoms of thy dream:

Leave lonely fields, and yet more lonely
 throng,
And in the kindly twilight stand before
The meanest cabin; from its open door,
In low, sweet strains, will float the Song
 of Songs,

As soft the mother's eyes yearn o'er her
 child,
And from her crooning lips, like incense
 rare,
She breathes the vespers of her mother-
 care
Above the lids its music hath beguiled!

“MA’S ATTIC”

Sometimes when I’ve been ’spesh’ly good
An’ brought in heaps an’ heaps of wood,
An’ kept f’om muddyin’ up the floor,
Hain’t dragged my feet nor slammed the
door,

Ma says to me: “If you’ll take care
Not to upset the things up there
I wouldn’t wonder if you may
Go to the attic for your play.”
Gee! Don’t I like that attic room,
With grandma’s spinning-wheel and
loom!

I tell you it’s the bestest place
For boys to play—just lots of space,
An’ yet it’s full of trumpery
That interests a boy like me.
Bags of good things to eat up there—
If you just happen to know where!—
Sweet flag and cherries that I got

Out of old Thompson's pasture lot
Along th' banks of th' Mazon,
An' brought 'em home to nibble on.
There's grandpa Dowd's old hat and
cane—

I wisht he'd visit us again!—
But best of all what ma calls "truck"
Is my great grandpa's sword that's stuck
Behind the chest he took to sea.
It's just a little long for me,
But when I climb upon the lid
Of that old chest I'm Captain Kidd;
An' then I swing the sword an' say
Bad pirate words—but just in play!
Who cares for spider webs an' dirt
That's in the attic? They don't hurt!
They hain't another place to play
Like attics on a rainy day!

A PICTURE

Is this your dream of Love: A piquant
face,
A girl in just her girlish, lissome grace?
Oh! this is not Love's picture as it stands
Within my heart! Paint me two folded
hands
That tell of patient toil and pain and
prayer,
Hands that have lifted many another's
care
And made it light, as mother's hands
will do—
Then you have painted Love, sublime
and true!

IMMORTALITY

There is no death ! The flowers of Love
and Truth

Live on, and ever shall live, while
At that old fable Death we only smile,
As at a childish tale recalled in youth.

MOTHER

Lips voicing only God's sweet tender-
ness;

Far-seeing eyes for the incipient good,
And faithful hands that never cease to
brood

Above their own, content to serve and
bless!

RESURRECTION CHANT

Stirs the heart of bud and bird
With the resurrection word:
Hallelujah!

See the glad perennial birth,
Life again is Lord of earth,
Hallelujah!

“Christ is risen!” Song and flower
Shout the sweet triumphal hour,
Hallelujah!

Joy, not Sorrow, reigns to-day—
King of Kings shall reign for aye!—
Hallelujah!

Sleeping hopes put forth their bloom;
Song unseals the vanquished tomb,
Hallelujah!

Hail in every scented breath
Of bursting bud the doom of Death,
Hallelujah!

Love immortal from the soul
Every prison stone doth roll,
Hallelujah!

Hail the resurrection morn:
Christ in every heart new-born!
Hallelujah!

FEAR

Once, like a hunted fugitive, I sped
Across the dreadful desert of Existence
drear—

Each shadow of its driving sands a Fear
Full-armed with lance of fateful, unspent
dread!

But now no more I fear, for spent and
fled

Is every phantom of potential ill;
Truth bids each lying sense be still;
Love fills all life, and Fear itself is dead!

A GOLDEN WEDDING VERSE

Count not the years like treasured gold !
Love knows no hearts as young or old,
But mocks the flight of phantom Time,
Nor heeds the New Year's hollow chime.
Youth is before you, not behind;
A thousand golden summers wind
Before your happy foot-steps' tread—
Age cannot touch the truly-wed!

THE ZITHERN PLAYER

Over the zithern's strings
In vibrant wanderings
Her supple fingers glide;
Now soft as Lethean dreams,
Now swift as singing streams:
A fickle, slumb'rous tide!

What wraith of sad Despair
Guideth thy fingers fair
In mellow, dreamful grief?
A ghost of mournful wind
Whispering of Love unkind
To Autumn's lonely leaf!

* * *

Strike out a sweeter tune
Like the soft hint of June
Upon thy blushing cheek—
Of dewy blooms that tempt
The boisterous bees unkempt
Their honeyed sweets to seek!

HOPE'S VALENTINE

Thus would I write my heart's best val-
entine:

The wish that every weary soul may
know

Sweet rest; that those who thirst may
quaff the wine

Of heavenly inspiration, cup divine,
Kindling all being with its holy glow!

To those earth blinded souls who grope
and fear,

Nor lift their eyes to Hope's serenest sky,

My valentine would be a thought to clear

Each darkened sense, dispel the visions
drear

And for each specter show an angel nigh.

FATHER'S COAT

It dangles from the chimney hook
Where it has hung a score of years—
A ragged coat! Yet as I look
Upon its faded folds, the tears
Once more in tender mists arise,
Touched with the light of childhood's
 skies!

Among the rows of rustling corn
I catch the old coat's glint of brown;
It moves afield in gray of morn
Nor rests 'till evening settles down
And crickets chirp the cheering lay
That marks the soft decline of day.

Astride its smooth-worn collar band
A bare-foot boy is perched in state—
His bridle rein a brawny hand,
His goal the balsam-shaded gate
Where the tall charger drops his load
And plods adown the dusty road.

What wealth of sweets from village store
Has hid within those pockets old!
More prized than gems from foreign
shore

Or all the Orient's wealth of gold,
The dear old coat sheds kindly grace
From him who hung it in its place!

LUCY'S BOY

I never see a leetle shaver scud
F'm school t'reach th' nighest vacant lot;
'Thout thinking uv the cunnin' leetle
 spud

That my own Lucy an' her man hes got.

I s'pose I'm biased in his favor—still,
His han'some pints t' me er jest es plain
Es sunshine on th' slope uv Beechum's
 Hill,

Chasin' th' shadows 'crost th' growin'
 grain.

I'd ruther hold that boy ag'inst my vest
An' watch him suck his chubby leetle
 thumb

Than own the likeliest farm in all the
 west

Er half th' golden lots in Kingdom
 Come!

There ain't a robin er a medder-lark
Thet's got a sweeter voice than Lucy's
 boy;
An' I'd stop fam'ly prayers plumb short
 t' hark
And hear him whistle "Come Ye Sons of
 Joy"!

Th' apple blossoms siftin' f'm th' tree
Ain't half so sweet as Lucy's leetle chap;
An' when he comes ag'in t' visit me
He'll camp—fust thing—in his ol'
 grampa's lap!

IN THOMPSON'S STORE

I've tramped this city o'er and o'er
An' hunted high an' low to find
A loafin' place like Thompson's store,
Where them that's sociably inclined
Can sit an' talk with neighbor folks
An' spin their yarns an' crack their jokes.

I'm goin' back again to where
I'll hear the old man Thompson call:
"Come, jine the circle! Take a chair!"
Why, bless my soul! I know 'em all;
Their kinks are jest as plain t' me
As doin' sums by rule o' three.

It makes me lonesome when I think
Of how we sat around the stove
In Thompson's store an' tipped the wink
An' gave Si' Biggs a gentle shove
When ol' maid Lucy came t' buy—
'Bout Christmas time—a man's black tie.

Gossip, of course, without no end!—
But harmless talk, for each one there
Was reckoned everybody's friend
An' bound t' see all treated fair.
I'd ruther sit in Thompson's store
Than tread the finest city floor.

We've settled weighty problems, too,
Around that red hot cannon stove;
An' words of wisdom, good an' true,
From out God's holy book of love
Were heard from honest lips intent
On some deep gospel argument.

No more of city life for me!
I'm goin' home to warm th' chair
That's waitin' with a welcome free
As God's green fields an' country air
In Thompson's store. Lord bless th'
place!

I's stocked with honest goods and grace!

PIONEERS OF THE PRAIRIES

Sons of New England's stern and hardy
stock!
In rugged frame and sober, care-seamed
face,
Their early struggles, 'mid a soil of rock,
Have left, perchance, a dark and sombre
trace;
Sharp as the husk that hides the ripened
corn,
But sound of heart as is its hardy ear!
I hold a better race was never born:
To wrong a fellow man its only fear!
In Northern woods they felled the giant
pine
And caught the spirit of its rugged
grace;—
Through prairies traced the furrow's
blackened line,
And grew in manhood with each patient
pace!

Thanks for your legacy of honest worth:
Your grand humility, your conscience
true;

A royal heritage! a kingly birth!
Unstained and pure as morning's bright-
est dew!

But greater thanks that we to-day may
scan,

In human symbol and in mortal sign,
The deathless lineage of Immortal Man,
Child of God's thought—the fatherhood
Divine!

ON THE PHOTOGRAPH OF A
BOY (*To Little Platt Meadowcroft*)

Blue-eyed dreamer, tell me true:
Is the world as fair to you
As the smile that lights your face
With its sweet and fearless grace?
Life: is it the glad surprise
That laughs at me from those dear eyes?
And are the hearts of men as white
As that pure forehead kissed by light
And touched with curling strands of
gold?
Is this the face of soldier bold?
And these a general's lips, that part
In smiles upspringing from the heart?
More like a thought of Love you seem
Than child of man or mortal dream;
And such I hold you, little friend,
For every mortal dream must end;
And only God's child shall endure
Forever gentle, sweet and pure!

A MILKWEED POD

Only a bit of wayside folly—
A midge of Summer dancing along
To mingle with your Christmas holly,
Making the notes of the year's full song.

A WISH

If wishes into sweet fulfillment turned
I'd tread again the dusty old turnpike,
Where sentinels of royal sumach burned
In knightly plume and nodding rusty
spike.

I'd rout the yellow butterflies that stay
In pulsing circles 'round each drying
pool,
And then I'd stop an hour or so and play
With all the boys about the Munger
school—

Build aqueducts of hollow smellage stalk
And prison dams for speckled "horny-
dace;"
Then ramble down the willow-shaded
walk
That skirts the millpond and its winding
race.

When evening came I'd fire a big brush
heap,
Piled high with boughs of fresh cut ever-
green;
And watch the wild sparks upward dance
and leap,
Till all the sky swirled with their ghostly
sheen!

HERE endeth the book, IN THOMP-
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